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### **Local Student Experiences Marine Science Firsthand at Woods Hole Science Aquarium**

They came from diverse educational and family backgrounds and from states across the nation, but for Elizabeth Benson of North Easton, Mass., one of the 11 high school and college students who spent the summer at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (WHSA) in Falmouth, Mass., it was a summer to remember.

Feeding fish, training harbor seals, cleaning tanks, leading shore-side collecting trips for the public, and helping children and adults learn about marine animals at the touch tanks were all part of her daily routine. The WHSA offers three summer programs for students who have completed grade 10 or higher. The programs are run by the WHSA staff, and are projects of NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and the neighboring private, nonprofit Marine Biological Laboratory.

For the past few summers, Benson has combined her love of animals and the ocean to volunteer as a high school student and more recently to work as a college student intern at WHSA. What makes it a bit unusual is her career interest. She wants to be an equine physical therapist, working with horses.

While horses are clearly not part of the Aquarium's collection, she says working with the harbor seals and other marine animals has provided her with an opportunity to learn diverse training methods and gain experience using positive reinforcement methods. It has also enabled her to learn her own strengths and weaknesses in a professional work setting, and to work with the other interns and Aquarium staff as a team with diverse backgrounds.

Benson was one of three college students working at the Aquarium June 30 through August 20 through the Bradford E. Brown Student Internship program, named for a retired NOAA Fisheries scientist who was a leader in recruiting young people into fishery science.

The annual internships provide students with the opportunity to work with a professional staff caring for a collection of about 140 species of fish and invertebrates common to the continental shelf from Maine to North Carolina, two harbor seals named LuSeal and Bumper, and sometimes sea turtles held for rehabilitation and eventual release. The interns learn about marine animal husbandry, aquarium operations, conservation, and public education. They are also trained to serve as assistant naturalists on public collecting walks to local harbors and estuaries.

The college interns also participated in the two-week Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 21 to August 1, along with eight high school students from California, Massachusetts, New York and Utah. The seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

“This summer working with the seals is by far my favorite activity,” the veteran intern said. “It is a great opportunity to be able to work with animals, teaching them behaviors that will help them survive and thrive here since they cannot be re-released into the wild.”

A 2006 graduate of Oliver Ames High School in Easton, where she played high school and travel team soccer and was a member of the varsity swim team, Liz also played flute in the school band and was a member of the National Honor Society. Now a junior at UMASS Lowell, she is a member of the college’s equestrian team and is majoring in exercise physiology since equine physical therapy is not a major and is a career path that will require specialized training and experience.

She is well on her way, having worked at the Sharon Veterinary Clinic as a technician caring for hospitalized animals, and at Kyriebrook Farm in West Bridgewater where she cared for more than 20 horses. She also volunteered at Handi-Kids Therapeutic Riding Center in West Bridgewater, teaching disabled children how to ride horses, and recently helped care for an elderly dementia patient.

A summer resident of Falmouth, she attended the Children’s School of Science in Woods Hole when she was younger, and was a high school summer intern at the Aquarium in 2004. She enjoyed that experience so much she applied a few years later to the Bradford E. Brown Student Internship Program for college students and was accepted. The program is named for a retired NOAA Fisheries scientist who was a leader in recruiting young people into fishery science. During the summer of 2007 she worked as an aquarium program assistant to care for the animals, plan public events and work with the high school interns, and was accepted again in 2008.

Benson says she doesn’t mind the other routine duties that come with the internship, like cleaning tanks, preparing food and feeding the various animals, and making sure the water systems are working properly.

“It is one of the best jobs you could have,” she says of being part of the Aquarium team. “You learn so much for the year-round staff, and you feel respected and appreciated. Being part of the diverse community in Woods Hole, where people come from all over the world and from so many different backgrounds, is amazing. It is fun to meet people and learn about them. And you cannot beat the environment – being by the ocean and going out on collecting trips to the beach is not a bad way to spend the summer!”

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